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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to elucidate the relationship between linguistic form, interactional strategies and social meaning on the basis of a detailed study of a natural conversation. The investigation is based on a conversation recorded in an institution for Mexican immigrants by a linguist, a native American of Mexican ancestry, and program advisor of the institution. His interlocutor was a community counselor employed in the program. Two types of information were utilized. Turns containing a code switch were first examined as to their place within the structure of the total conversation. Then the switched phrase was substituted with a phrase from the other language to determine what the code switch contributed to the meaning of the whole passage. These examples of bilingual communication indicate that language usage is closely tied to the position of Chicanos as a minority group within the English-speaking majority. Selection of alternate forms is related to a variety of social factors such as ethnic identity, age and sex, and degree of solidarity or confidentiality. (CFM)

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COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF BILINGUAL COMMUNICATION

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COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF BILINGUAL COMMUNICATION

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Sociolinguistic studies of bilingualism for the most part focus on the linguistic aspects of the problem. Having discovered that speakers alternate between what, from a linguistic point of view, constitute grammatically distinct systems, investigators then proceed to study where and under what conditions alternants are employed, either through surveys in which speakers are asked to report their own language usage (Fishman 1965) or by counting the occurrence of relevant forms in samples of elicited speech. The assumption is that the presence or absence of particular linguistic alternates directly reflects significant information about such matters as group membership, values, relative prestige power relationship, etc.

There is no doubt that such one-to-one relationships between language and social phenomena do exist in most societies. Where speakers control and regularly employ two or more speech varieties and continue to do so over long periods of time, it is most likely that each of the two varieties will be associated with certain activities or social characteristics of speakers. This is especially the case in formal or ceremonial situations, such as religious or magical rites, court proceedings, stereotyped introductions, greetings or leavetakings. Here language, as well as gestures and other aspects of demeanor, may be so rigidly specified as to form part of the defining characteristics of the setting--so much so that a change in language may change the setting. Similarly, ethnic minorities in complex societies often maintain a clear separation between the native language which is spoken at home and with in-group members and the outside language used in commercial transactions or at work with outsiders.

There are, however, many other cases where such correlations break down. Consider the following sentences from a recently recorded

discussion between two educated Mexican Americans.

1. W. Well I'm glad that I met you. O.K. ?
   M. Andale, pues (O.K. SWELL) and do come again. Mm.
2. M. Conellos do (WITH THE TWO OF THEM). With each other. La senora trabaja en la caneria orita, you know? (THE MOTHER WORKS IN THE CANNERY RIGHT NOW). She was...con Francine jugaba...(SHE USED TO PLAY WITH FRANCINE...) with my little girl.
3. M. There's no children in the neighborhood. Well...si hay criaturas (THERE ARE CHILDREN).
4. M. ...those friends are friends from Mexico que tienen chamaquitos (WHO HAVE LITTLE CHILDREN).
5. M.. ...that has nothing to do con que le hagan esta...(WITH THEIR DOING THIS).
6. M. But the person...de...de grande (AS AN ADULT) is gotta have something in his mouth.
7. M. And my uncle Sam es el mas agavachado (IS THE MOST AMERICANIZED).

It would be futile to predict the occurrence of either English or Spanish in the above utterances by attempting to isolate social variables which correlate with linguistic form. Topic, speaker, setting are common in each case. Yet the code changes sometimes in the middle of a sentence.

Language mixing of this type is by no means a rarity. Linguists specializing in bilingualism cite it to provide examples of extreme instances of interference (Mackey, 1965) and middle class native speakers in ethnically diverse communities are frequently reluctant to recognize its existence. Yet it forms the subject of many humorous treatises. In spite of the fact that such extreme code switching is held in disrepute it is very persistent, occurring whenever minority language groups come in close contact with majority language groups under conditions of rapid

social change. One might, by way of an explanation, simply state that both codes are equally admissible in some contexts and that code switching is merely a matter of the individual's momentary inclination. Yet the alternation does carry meaning. Let us compare the following passage from a recent analysis of Russian pronominal usage (Friedrich: 1966) with an excerpt from our conversation.

> An arrogant aristocratic lieutenant and a grizzled, older captain find themselves thrust together as the only officers on an isolated outpost in the Caucasus. Reciprocal formality at first seems appropriate to both. But while the latter is sitting on the young lieutenant's bed and discussing a confidential matter he switches to ty (tu). When the lieutenant appears to suggest insubordination, however, the captain reverts to vy (vous) as he issues a peremptory demand... (p. 240)

8. M. I don't think I ever have any conversations in my dreams. I just dream. Ha. I don't hear peopie talking; I jus' see pictures.
9. E. Oh. They're old-fashioned, then. They're not talkies, yet, Huh?
10. M. They're old-fashioned. No. They're not talkies, yet. No. I'm trying to think. Yeah, there too have been talkies. Different. In Spanish and English both. An' I would't be too surprised if I even had some in Chinese. (Laughter). Yeah, Ed. Deveras (REALLY). (M. offers E a cigarette which is refused). Tu no fumas, verdad? Yo tampoco. Deje de fumar.

The two societies, the social context and the topics discussed differ, yet the shift from English to Spanish has connotations similar to the alternation between the formal (second person pronoun) vy (vous) and the informal ty (tu). Both signal a change in interpersonal relationship in the direction of greater informality or personal warmth. Although the linguistic signs differ, they reflect similar social strategies. What the linguist identifies as code switching may convey important social information. The present paper is an attempt to elucidate the relationship between linguistic form, interactional strategies and social meaning on the basis of a detailed study of a natural conversation. The conversation was

recorded in an institution specializing in English instruction for Mexican immigrants. The staff, ranging in age from recent high school graduates to persons in their middle fifties, includes a large number of people of Mexican or Mexican-American descent as well as some English speaking Americans. Of the latter group several speak Spanish well. The recording was made by a linguist (E), a native American of Mexican ancestry who is employed as an advisor for the program. His interlocutor (M) is a community counselor employed in the program. She is a woman without higher education who has been trained to assist the staff in dealing with the local community. She has had some experience in public affairs. In spite of the difference in education and salary, both participants regard each other as colleagues within the context of the program. When speaking Spanish they address each other by the reciprocal tu. The program director or a Spanish-speaking outsider visitor would receive the respectful "usted". Conversations within the office are normally carried on in English although, as will be seen later, there are marked stylistic differences which distinguish interaction among Mexican-Americans from interaction across ethnic boundaries.

For analysis the taped transcript was roughly divided into episodes each centering around a single main topic. Episodes were then subdivided into 'turns of speaking' (i.e. one or more sentences reflecting a speaker's response to another's comment). The author and the interviewer cooperated in the analysis of social meaning. Two types of information were utilized. Turns containing a code switch were first examined as to their place within the structure of the total conversation in terms of such questions as: what were the relevant antecedents of the turn and what followed? what was the turn in response to , either in the same or preceding episodes? The purpose here was to get as detailed as possible an estimation of the speaker's intent. In the second stage the switched phrase would be substituted with a phrase from the other language in somewhat the same way that a linguistic interviewer uses

the method of variation within a frame in order to estimate the structural significance of a particular item. By this method it was possible to get an idea of what the code switch contributed to the meaning of the whole passage.

Before discussing the social aspects of code switching some discussion of what it is that is being switched is necessary. Not all instances of Spanish words in the text are necessarily instances of code switching. Expressions like andale pues (item 1) dice (he says) are normally part of the bilingual's style of English. Speakers use such expressions when speaking to others of the same ethnic background in somewhat the same way that Yiddish expressions like nebbish, oi gewalt, or interjections like du hoerst characterize the ingroup English style of some American Jews. They serve as stylistic ethnic identity markers and are frequently used by speakers who no longer have effective control of both languages. The function of such forms as an ethnic identity marker becomes particularly clear in the following sequence between M. and a woman visitor in her office.

Woman: Well, I'm glad that I met you. O.K.?

M. Andale, pues. (O.K. SWELL) And do come again. Mm?

The speakers, both Mexican-Americans, are strangers who have met for the first time. The andale pues is given in response to the woman's O.K., as if to say: 'although we are strangers we have the same background and should get to know each other better."

Aside from loan word nouns such as chicano, gavacho, or pocho, the ethnic identity markers consist largely of exclamations and sentence connectors. For example,

11. M. I says Lupe no hombre (WHY NO) don't believe that.

12. M. Si (YES) but it doesn't.

13. M. That baby is ... pues (THEN)

Mexican-Spanish is similarly marked by English interjections. Note for example the you know in the sentence:

14. M. Pero como, you know... la Estela...

The English form here seems a regular part of the Spanish text and this is signalled phonetically by the fact that the pronunciation of the vowel o is relatively undipthongized and thus differs from other instances of o in English passages. Similarly, words like ice cream have Spanish-like pronunciations when they occur within Spanish texts and English-like pronunciations in the English text.

The greater part of the instances of true code switching consist of entire sentences inserted into the other language text. There are, however, also some examples of change within single sentences, which require special comment. In the item below, the syntactic connection is such that both parts can be interpreted as independent sentences.

15. M. We've got all these kids here right now, los que estan ya criados aqui (THOSE THAT HAVE BEEN RAISED HERE).

This is not the case with the noun qualifier phrase in item (4) and the verb complement in (5). Other examples of this latter type are:

16. M. But the person...de...de grande (AS AN ADULT) is gotta have something in its mouth.

17. M. Sera que quiero la tetera? para pacify myself. (IT MUST BE THAT I WANT THE BABY BOTTLE TO...)

18. M. The type of work he did cuando trabajaba (WHEN HE WORKED) he...what...that I remember, era regador (HE WAS AN IRRIGATOR) at one time.

19. M. An' my uncle Sam es el mas agavachado (IS THE MOST AMERICANIZED).

Noun qualifiers (4), verb complements (5), parts of a noun phrase (16) the predicate portion of an equational sentence (19) all can be switched. This does not mean, however, that there are no linguistic constraints on the co-occurrence of Spanish and English forms. The exact specification of these constraints will, however, require further detailed investigation. Clearly, aside from single loan words, entire

sentences are most easily borrowed. Sentence modifiers or phrases are borrowed less frequently. And this borrowing does seem to be subject to some selection constraints (Blom and Gumperz 1970). But some tentative statements can be made. Constructions like:

*que have chamaquitos (WHO HAVE BOYS)

or,

*he era regador (HE WAS AN IRRIGATOR)

seem impossible.

The Social Meaning of Code Switching

When asked why they use Spanish in an English sentence or vice-versa, speakers frequently come up with explanations like the following taken from our conversation:

a. If there's a word that I can't find, it keeps comin' out in Spanish.

b. I know what word I want and finally when I . . . well bring it out in Spanish, I know the person understands me.

Difficulty in finding the right word clearly seems to account for examples like: para pacify myself (item 17). In other instances, some items of experience, some referents or topics are more readily recalled in one language than in another, as in:

20. M. I got to thinking vacilando el pun to este (MULLING OVER THIS POINT)

21. M. They only use English when they have to. . . like for cuando van de compras (WHEN THEY GO SHOPPING).

Linguistically motivated switches into English occur when the discussion calls for psychological terminology or expressions, e.g. 'pacify', 'relax', 'I am a biter'. Such expressions or modes of talking seem rarely used in typically Mexican-American settings. On the other hand, ideas and experiences

associated with the speaker's Spanish speaking past such as items (20) and (21) trigger off a switch into Spanish.

In many other instances, however, there seems to be no linguistic reason for the switch. Si hay criaturas (item 3) is directly translated without hesitation pause in the following sentence. Many other Spanish expressions have English equivalents elsewhere in the text. Furthermore, there are several pages of more general, abstract discussion which contain no Spanish at all.

One might hypothesize that codes are shifted in response to E's suggestion and that M answers him in whatever language he speaks. This is clearly not the case. Several questions asked in English elicit Spanish responses and vice-versa.

In discussing the social aspects of switching it is important to note that while the overt topic discussed is the use of English and Spanish, much of the conversation is dominated by a concern with Mexican versus non-Mexican, i.e., common middle-class values or group membership. Spanish occurs most in episodes dealing with typically Mexican-American experiences. In several places fears are expressed that Mexican-American children are losing their language and thus, by implication, denying their proper cultural heritage. To some extent the juxtaposition of English and Spanish symbolizes the duality of value systems evidenced in the discussion.

At the start of the conversation several exchanges dealing with the mechanics of tape recorder operation are entirely in English. Code shifts begin with a sequence where M. asks E. why he is recording their talk and E. responds:

E. I want to use it as a...as an example of how chicanos can shift back and forth from one language to another.

M. Ooo. Como andabamos platicando (OH. LIKE WE WERE SAYING).

M.'s switch to Spanish here is a direct response to his (E.'s) use of the word chicanos. Her statement refers to previous conversations they have had on related subjects and suggest that she is willing to treat the

present talk as a friendly chat among fellow chicanos rather than as a formal interview.

Codes alternate only as long as all participants are chicanos and while their conversation revolves around personal experiences. Towards the end of the recording session, when a new participant enters, talk goes on. The newcomer is an American of English speaking background who, having lived in Latin America, speaks Spanish fluently. Yet in this context she was addressed only in English and did not use her Spanish. Furthermore, in the earlier part of the session, when E. and M. were alone, there was one long episode where M. spoke only English even when responding to E's Spanish questions. This passage deals with M's visit to San Quentin prison, to see an inmate, and with prison conditions. The inmate was referred to only in English and the conversation contained no overt reference to his ethnic background. Further inquiries made while analysis was in progress revealed that he was a non-chicano. It is evident from the first example that it is social identity and not language per se which is determinant in code selection. The second example indicates when conversations have no reference to speakers or their subjects' status as chicanos and when as in the present case a subject is treated in a generally detached manner without signs of personal involvement, code switching seems to be inappropriate.

On the whole one has the impression that except for a few episodes dealing with recollections of family affairs, the entire conversation is basically in English. English serves to introduce most new information, while Spanish provides stylistic embroidering to amplify the speaker's intent. Spanish sentences frequently take the form of pre-coded, stereo-typed or idiomatic phrases.

While ethnic identity is important as the underlying theme, the actual contextual meanings of code alternation are more complex.

Turning to a more detailed analysis, many of the Spanish passages

reflect direct quotes or reports of what M. has said in Spanish or of what other Mexicans have told her, e.g. (below)

24. Because I was speakin' to my baby... my ex-baby sitter, and we were talkin' about the kids you know, an' I was tellin' her ... uh, "Pero, como, you know... uh... la Estela y la Sandi... relistas en el telefon. Ya hablan mucho ingles." Dice, "Pos... si. Mira tu, " dice, "Pos... el... las palabras del television. Y ya que me dice... ya me pide dinero pa'l 'ayscrin'y..." You know? "Y lue... y eso no es nada, esperate los chicharrones, you know, when they start school"...

(BUT, HOW, YOU KNOW... UH... ESTELA AND SANDI ARE VERY PRECOCIOUS ON THE TELEPHONE. THEY ALREADY SPEAK A LOT OF ENGLISH." SHE SAYS, "WELL, YES, JUST IMAGINE" SHE SAYS, "WELL I DON"T KNOW WHERE THEY GET IT FROM, " SHE SAYS, "WELL, THE WORDS ON TELEVISION, AND SHE ALREADY TELLS ME... SHE ALREADY ASKS ME FOR MONEY I OR ICE CREAM AND"... YOU KNOW? "AND THEN... AND THAT ISN'T ANYTHING, WAIT FOR THE CHICHARRONES, YOU KNOW, WHEN THEY START SCHOOL"...)

Throughout the conversation Spanish is used in quoting statements by individuals whose chicano identity is emphasized. The following passage in which Lola, who is Mexican origin, is quoted in English seemed to at first contradict this generalization.

25. An' Lola says, "Dixie has some, Dixie"... So Dixie gave me a cigarette.

Lola, however, is in her late teens and members of her age group, although they know Spanish, tend to prefer English even in informal interaction. Later on, however, if they marry within the chicano community, they are quite likely to revert to the predominant usage pattern. The use of English in her case reflects the fact that for the present, at least, Lola identifies with the majority group of English monolinguals with respect to language usage nouns.

The pattern of quoting chicanos in Spanish and talking about them in English is reversed in the following passage in which M. reports on

the way she talks to her children:

26. Yea. Uh-huh. She'll get... "Linda, you don' do that, mija... (DAUGHTER) La vas... (YOU ARE GOING TO...) you're going to get her... give her... a bad habit." Le pone el dedo pa'que se lo muerda, (SHE GIVES HER HER FINGER TO BITE), you know, "Iiya, she'll bite the heck out of you." "Ow!" La otra grita, (THE OTHER ONE YELLS). So, una es sadist y la otra es masochist (SO, ONE IS A SADIST AND THE OTHER IS A MASOCHIST). (Laughter.)

Further enquiry again reveals that in M.'s family children are ordinarily addressed in English.

Aside from direct quotes, Spanish occurs in several modifying phrases or sentences such as: those from Mexico, que tienen chamaquitos. (Item 4). The effect here is to emphasize the ethnic identity of the referent. The use of si hay criaturas is particularly interesting in this respect. It is preceded by the following exchange:

27. M. There's no children. The Black Panthers next door. You know what I mean.

E. Do they have kids?

M. Just the two little girls.

E. No, no. I mean do some of the other people in the neighborhood have kids?

M. They don't associate with no children... There's no children in the neighborhood. Well... si hay criaturas (THERE ARE CHILDREN, YES.)

M. goes on to talk about the one other Mexican family in the building. The si hay criaturas here serves to single out Mexican children from others and in a sense modifies the there's no children several sentences above. The implication is that only the other chicano children are suitable playmates.

In a last group of examples the switch to Spanish signals the relative confidentiality or privateness of the message. The first example cited as item 2 above is a case in point:

28. With each other. La senora trabaja en la cameria orita, you know. (THE MOTHER WORKS IN THE CANNERY).

Here M.'s voice is lowered and the loudness decreases in somewhat the same way that confidentiality is signalled in English monolingual speech. Next consider the following:

29. E. An' how...about how about now?

M. Estos...me los halle...estos Pall Mall's me los hallaron (THESE...I FOUND ...THESE PALL MALL'S...THEY WERE FOUND FOR ME...) No, I mean...

M. has been talking about the fact that she smokes very little, and E. discovers some cigarettes on her desk. Her Spanish, punctuated by an unusually large number of hesitation pauses, lends to the statement an air of private confession. She is obviously slightly embarrassed. Note the almost regular alternation between Spanish and English in the next passage:

30. Mm-huh. Yeah. An'...an' they tell me "How did you quit, Mary?" I di'n' quit. I...I just stopped. I mean it was'n' an effort I made que voy a dejar de fumar porque me hace dano o (THAT I'M GOING TO STOP SMOKING BECAUSE IT'S HARMFUL TO ME, OR...) this or that, uh-uh. It just ...that...eh...I used to pull butts out of the ... the... the wastepaper basket. Yeah. (Laughter). I used to go look in the ... (Unclear)...se me acababan los cigarros en la noche. (MY CIGARETTES WOULD RUN OUT AT NIGHT). I'd get desperate, y ahi voy al basurero a buscar, a sacar, you know? (Laughter) (AND THERE I GO TO THE WASTEBASKET TO LOOK FOR SOME, TO GET SOME,).

The juxtaposition of the two codes here is used to great stylistic effect in depicting the speaker's attitudes. The Spanish phrases, partly by being associated with content like 'it is harmful to me' or with references to events like ' cigarettes running out at night ' and through intonational and other suprasegmental clues, convey a sense of personal feeling. The English phrases are more neutral by contrast. The resulting effect of alternate personal involvement and clinical detachment vividly reflects M.'s ambiguity about her smoking.

Our examples of bilingual communication indicate that language usage is closely tied to the position of chicanos as a minority group within the English speaking majority. Selection of alternate forms is related to a variety of social factors such as ethnic identity, age and sex (as in the case of Lola in item 25), degree of solidarity or confidentiality, etc.

In our conversational contexts at least, the relationship of such factors to verbal messages is quite different from what the sociologist means by correlation among variables. We could not take a rating of, for example, ethnicity or degree of solidarity as measured by the usual survey techniques, or other scaling devices and expect this rating to predict the occurrence of Spanish and English in our texts. Such ratings determine the likelihood of a switch but they do not tell us when a switch occurs in a particular case, nor do they predict the meaning of a switch. What seems to be involved rather is a symbolic process very much like that by which linguistic signs convey semantic information. Code selection, in other words, is meaningful in much the same way that lexical choice is meaningful. The regular use of particular speech varieties in speech events specific to certain classes of speakers and speaker-related activities sets up associations between these varieties and features of the social environment which are like the associations between words and objects. As long as the

forms in question are used in their normal or regular setting these associations convey no new information. But in contexts where--as in the examples cited here--there is an option, where one variety is merely normal and speakers can juxtapose another variety, selection becomes meaningful. The second, juxtaposed set of forms becomes socially marked in sense that it introduces into the new context some of the semantic features of the speech events with which it is normally associated in the minds of the participants.

In the present conversation, English is normal, except in a few passages with special content, and here the objective information is introduced in English while the Spanish is marked and typically occurs in modifier phrases and sentences. Items such as 'there are no children' followed few sentences later by si hay criaturas or I got to thinking, or vacilando el punto éste, where the Spanish elaborates on previous subject matter, exemplifies what we mean by marking through juxtaposition.

The decoding process by which speakers judge the significance of marked forms bears close similarity to normal semantic decoding. In other words, speakers select from alternate dictionary meanings or semantic features in accordance with the contextual constraints imposed by semantic and syntactic rules. In the present case, Spanish derives its basic meaning from its association with communication among chicanos. But for chicano speakers in-group communication also carries secondary meanings of solidarity or confidentiality when compared to verbal interaction in a mixed group. The speakers judge what is meant in each case by evaluating the reasonableness of a particular interpretation in the light of the topic discussed and his own knowledge of social nouns. Social structure like syntax aids in the interpretation of sentences. It is part of what a speaker has to know in order to judge the full import of what is said. Two speakers will make similar interpretations of a sentence only if they interpret it in terms of the same social assumptions.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has some important implications for the cross-cultural study of bilingualism. Since there is more to communication than grammar alone, (and I am using the term 'grammar' in the sense of which that term is usually defined by linguists) mere knowledge of the alternating variations is not enough. The investigator must control the speakers' own system and must pay particular attention to the often quite arbitrary signs by which these values are signalled in speech.

To be sure, any analysis which, like ours, relies on a single case raises some question about the generality of the results. Are the processes discovered here peculiar to the present conversation and speakers, or do they account for the behavior of larger groups? Goffman has shown that to assign others to social roles or categories is a common behavioral strategy. What seems to be peculiar about the present case is not what is done but how and by what linguistic means it is done.

As a behavioral strategy, code switching bears considerable similarity to the use of polite and familiar address pronouns in other societies. Our findings regarding the relation of ethnic identity and confidentiality parallel Brown's findings (1965) about the connection between high status and social distance. English forms ordinarily associated with non-members, i.e. non-Chicanos, are like high status pronouns in that they convey formality or distance when used to refer to members, while customarily forms used among members, i. e. fellow-Chicanos, are like familiar pronouns in that they convey secondary meanings of solidarity and of confidentiality.

How does the cognitive approach to bilingual usage relate to the more usual survey methods? Obviously, it does not eliminate the need for surveys. In the many little known areas of the world, language usage surveys are essential tools for assembling basic data on usage norms and

attitudes. But in the present rudimentary stage of our knowledge of language usage, survey questions tend to reflect the analyst's, and not the native's, theory of speaking. Analyses such as the present which are not too difficult or time consuming may provide important background information to improve survey content.

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